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SUBJECT: BULGARIA 2005 CHILD LABOR UPDATE

REFS: (A) STATE 143552 (B) 04 SOFIA 1616

1. SUMMARY: Since our 2004 report, Bulgaria has made significant progress in implementing a national strategy to fight child labor abuses. The GoB has signed an agreement with the International Labor Organization (ILO), established a child labor unit within the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, and appointed a Chief Coordinator to manage child labor issues. However, in 2004 the General Labor Inspectorate (GLI) forwarded 84 child labor violations to the Prosecutor's Office for prosecution under the country's amended child labor legislation, and to date only one employer has been sanctioned by a small fine. END SUMMARY.

#### PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING GOVERNMENT PLAN

2. Officials in the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy have emphasized to us Bulgaria's March 22, 2005, Memorandum of Understanding with the ILO as an example of the government's commitment to ending child labor abuses (ref B). In accordance with the memorandum, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has established a Child Labor Unit tasked with coordination of child labor issues and development of a national database on child labor in Bulgaria. In addition, in May 2005 the Labor Minister appointed a Chief Coordinator to be funded by the ILO for one year.

#### WORK AHEAD: IMPROVING COORDINATION AND MONITORING

3. NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE: The ILO memorandum calls for establishment of a National Steering Committee to be chaired either by the Labor Minister or other high-level government official nominated by the minister. The committee will coordinate policies aimed at eliminating the worst forms of child labor and will integrate the issue of child labor into the government's overall social services policy. On February 3, 2005, Bulgaria signed the EU Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM), which will allow Bulgaria to coordinate with the EU on child labor and other social issues upon accession.

4. Other key initiatives of the government's strategy to fight child labor abuse include:

--CHILD LABOR MONITORING SYSTEM: The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, in conjunction with other government bodies and NGOs, will establish a child labor monitoring system to include four centers (three in the Sofia region and one in the municipality of Kurdzhali) to monitor child labor and prepare training manuals for social workers;

--TRADE UNION TRAINING: ILO will translate and publish a newsletter Trade Unions and Child Labor with the objective of training trade union members and leaders on the worst forms of child labor; and

--INFORMAL CHILD LABOR: The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the ILO will conduct an Occupational Safety and Health Study of children working in the informal sector and will produce a list of prohibited types of work to serve as a reference for child protection agencies.

#### MIXED ENFORCEMENT RESULTS

5. After the illegal employment of children was criminalized in March 2004 (ref B), the GLI initiated a comprehensive public awareness campaign to inform employers of their duties under the new legislation. This has included information on the GLI website, the publication of press articles, and participation in specialized TV programs.

6. In 2004, the Inspectorate cited 138 violations involving youth under the age of 18 (down by 96 from 2003), representing 0.3 percent of all employment violations. Most labor violations involving minors were related to small- and medium-size enterprises either employing children without permission or failing to observe maximum working hours for those with work permits. Of these 138 cases, GLI has forwarded 84 more serious violations to the Prosecutor's office as violations of the amended Penal

Code. The Code allows for strict punishment, including imprisonment for up to six months. To date, however, Bulgarian courts have issued a sentence in only one of these cases - a fine of 500 Bulgarian leva (USD 333).

17. As in previous years, most permits granted for legal employment of those under the age of 18 were in the hotel and restaurant sector, with significant numbers of permits also issued for retail and apparel manufacturing. In 2004, the Inspectorate received a total of 5,418 applications for permits to employ minors, of which 5,096 were issued (1,066 permits more than in 2003).

#### PUBLIC AWARENESS

18. The Bulgarian government has formulated public awareness campaigns under the ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC). These programs focused on educating journalists, community leaders, employers, teachers, parents, and youth clubs on the consequences of the worst forms of child labor. Using a train-the-trainer approach, these Children's Rights programs focused on 80 young leaders from 10 municipalities as well as members of school affiliates of the UN Association of Bulgaria. These students will further educate 1,200 students and parents. Additionally, 32 journalists received training on child labor issues in the hope of spurring investigative reports on child labor abuses in Bulgaria.

19. In addition to this public awareness campaign, these programs will produce an analysis of the media coverage of child labor issues in Bulgaria and will publish a handbook for reporters. Participants will prepare investigative reports on child labor related to different sectors of the economy and will produce leaflets and posters to raise awareness of child labor issues.

10. COMMENT: Bulgaria's constructive partnership with the ILO underlines a greater government awareness of the need to adequately address child labor. Spurred by the recent agreement with the ILO, the Bulgarian government has built new child labor administrative capacity, including improved inter-agency coordination and a comprehensive child labor plan. The General Labor Inspectorate appears to be implementing its new responsibilities eagerly, and is actively seeking to establish cooperation with appropriate agencies in the U.S. However the GLI, the NGO community, and the U.S. mission alike continue to be frustrated by the slow progress in prosecuting cases of alleged child labor abuses. END COMMENT.

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